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The New "Fantasy Island" - a must see!

From: campbell@ufomind.com (Glenn Campbell, Las Vegas)

Date: Sun, 25 Oct 1998 17:20:31 -0800

This is your moderator, offering his enthusiastic recommendation of the new TV series, "Fantasy Island." (Saturday night on ABC-TV)

This one has little in common with the old series. It is much darker and deeper. There is no little dwarf calling "Da Plane, Da Plane." Mr. Rourke has psychic powers now, and is played with sinister charm by Malcolm McDowell.

For those of us burned out on "The X-Files", this series might make us watch television again.

Try it, you'll like it.

Glenn

----- Begin Web Page Excerpts -----

SHOW SUMMARY

From the official website at <http://www.spe.sony.com/tv/shows/fantasy/>

Welcome back to FANTASY ISLAND! A lot has changed in this tropical paradise since we last landed on its shores. Our island is more beautiful than ever before, dreams still come true there and romance, as always, awaits the willing visitor. But this is a whole new place and time, where things are not always as they seem and the welcoming crew have their own mysterious and fascinating back stories.

This is a darker, quirkier and more sophisticated place as envisioned by executive producer Barry Sonnenfeld ("Men In Black", "Get Shorty", "The Addams Family"), having all the fantasy, romance and mystery of the original with Sonnenfeld's signature spin. The series also features some of Hollywood's most respected talent, including Golden Globe nominee Malcolm McDowell, Emmy Award winner Fyvush Finkel, Madchen Amick, Edward Hibbert, Louis Lombardi and Academy Award nominee Sylvia Sidney.

Malcolm McDowell brings a new magic to the role of your host, Mr. Roarke, who has traded in his white jacket for a dark Armani suit, and sports a dangerous edge to go with it. He greets a new group of visitors on his lush property with French colonial trimmings, where he changes his guests' lives as he fulfills their lifelong dreams: some romantic, others dangerous and all compelling. With his wise sense and

droll touch, Roarke guides his guests through the most provocative adventures of their lives, but each experience has its price, lending new meaning to the old adage to be careful what you wish for -- you just may get it.

The devilish Roarke's disciples and fantasy facilitators are brutish but obedient Cal, portrayed by Louis Lombardi and flighty but hyperefficient Harry, played by Edward Hibbert, who do Roarke's bidding and accompany him to meet each week's guests. In the pilot episode, they are taken aback to learn that Roarke has hired another assistant, the beautiful and ethereal Ariel, portrayed by Madchen Amick. Ariel is a spirit who can conveniently shapeshift into another person or living thing in order to implement a guest's fantasy, while providing a fascinating and sexy counterpoint to Roarke.

Another addition to the new FANTASY ISLAND is the rather eerie travel agency, a dim and musty place that seems to have come from another time, and exists in no particular time or place at all. At the heart of it is travel agent Fisher, portrayed by the inimitable Fyvush Finkel. Fisher's name describes his job, which is to catch unsuspecting prospective guests in his net and send them off to FANTASY ISLAND. Someone may wander into the travel office with no clear idea of what sort of vacation he or she wants, prepared to pour through numerous brochures, but within moments will be mesmerized by the idea of a trip to FANTASY ISLAND.

Fisher has a magical ability to divine each person's deepest thoughts and wishes, which are copied down in detail by Sylvia Sidney as surly secretary Clia and then whisked by pneumatic tube to Roarke's island office. These instructions about a new guest are essentially Roarke's weekly marching orders, and he does not exactly relish their arrival. While the other crew on the island is in Roarke's service, Fisher is Roarke's nemesis, as week after week he shoots new challenges Roarke's way via tube.

Indeed, the FANTASY ISLAND crew's ultimate fantasy is to leave this lush place, to which they have all been banished to serve for mysterious reasons that viewers will get clues about throughout the season. Nevertheless, for the rest of us, Roarke's sensational style and clairvoyant knowledge and the crew's magical abilities, combined with FANTASY ISLAND's mystical surroundings and spectacular views, make this a place to visit over and over again.

The original FANTASY ISLAND also aired on the ABC network, and was one of producer Aaron Spelling's first big success stories. It was broadcast from January of 1978 until August of 1984 for a total of 130 episodes. Starring the suave and genteel Ricardo Montalban as Roarke, the show featured the unforgettable Herve Villechaize as his sidekick Tatum until the last season, when he was replaced by Christopher Hewett as Lawrence. Unlike the new FANTASY ISLAND, which is shot completely in Hawaii, the original was mostly shot at the Arboretum in Arcadia (outside Los Angeles), although the famed opening credits featuring twin waterfalls was filmed on Kauai. The first series did not delve too deeply into the back stories of the crew but rather focused almost exclusively on the guests, with the exception of the 1981 - 82 season, when Wendy Schall had a recurring role as Roarke's goddaughter. Ultimately broadcast in almost every continent the world over, the original series was a beloved favorite with millions of international viewers.

Barry Sonnenfeld, Barry Josephson, Andrew Schneider, Diane Frolov and Michael Dinnerare executive producers and Chris Waits and Paul Waits are co-executive producers of FANTASY ISLAND for Sonnenfeld Josephson Worldwide Entertainment in association with Columbia TriStar Television.

Q&A WITH EXECUTIVE PRODUCER BARRY SONNENFELD

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Q: Do you watch much TV, and did you watch the original FANTASY ISLAND series?

A: All I really watch is the Weather Channel. And, no I never did watch the original series until I'd committed to doing the new one!

Q: Then, why do a show like FANTASY ISLAND again?

A: Well, it seemed to me that it had a similar position with audiences

as did "The Addams Family", and as with that film, I felt that I could really bring my own special sensibility to it. There seemed to be a dark quality to the show I could delve into and make quirkier. I have a kind of absurdist approach to every situation. The success of my projects comes down to my own sense of comedy and that I trust my own sense of what's fun. Once I got into doing FANTASY ISLAND, my favorite thing about it is how visual it is, which is another area I can really work with.

Q: The visuals in the pilot certainly are a big step up from the original, which was shot in Los Angeles. Why did you choose Hawaii, and what else from your film background are you bringing to the show visually?

A: Both Barry Josephson and I felt strongly that nothing less than a true, lush island location would do, especially with the sophistication of viewers these days who demand more. As far as effects, there are a lot of special effects you can do on television that look similar to extremely sophisticated and high-priced effects on film, but because TV is much lower resolution, you can accomplish something similar far more cost effectively, and we've tried to do that as much as possible with FANTASY ISLAND. Despite the fact that it's pretty hard to do in just eight days, both "Maximum Bob" and FANTASY ISLAND will have the look of mini-feature films. I want to make sure that this show has a really different visual look.

Also, I'm excited about doing this series because it's going to provide a great proving ground for new talent. Since FANTASY ISLAND is so intensely visual, I'd like to bring in talent, such as a special effects manager and production designer I'm working with on "Wild, Wild West", and let them try directing an episode of FANTASY ISLAND.

Q: How are you going to reconcile what the fans of the old series loved with your quirky sensibility and "absurdist touch" in the new show?

A: We'll give the original fans enough stuff so that they get a clear recognition that we are acknowledging that the original existed. As far as the dark new twist we're giving to the show, I really feel that you can let audiences be smart and find the humor and other elements in a show without trying too hard to point them out. Audiences are much smarter and hipper than studios ever give them credit for.

Some specific elements we will implement are to bookend the show, with the last bit leading into the story for the next episode. Not all the stories will end happily, not everyone will get what they wished for and some endings will hold quite a surprise. In the new series, we will also focus much more heavily on the crew and their stories. These people are serving time on this island and don't really like their jobs there -- they are in a kind of purgatory, and their sentence is to have to serve these guests. We'll drop clues as to how they got on the island throughout the season. To accommodate the crew stories, after the premiere we'll cut the guest storylines back to two each week from three.

Q: Since you don't seem to watch much TV, what's your favorite film?

A: "Dr. Strangelove".

Q: What can you tell us in closing?

A: With this show, I'm really looking forward to taking something that's viewed as banal and normal, and putting my spin on it. That's the challenge for me, and it's what defines me -- to put an odd twist on the most banal things and make them new and different. So with FANTASY ISLAND, I'm taking an old television show and making it autobiographical in some way.

----- End Web Page Excerpts -----

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RELEVANCE OF THIS MESSAGE: Interesting

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